

The Amusing People of Bosnia

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AUSTRIA-HUNGARY is talking again about putting more railroad into Bosnia. Bosnia doesn't care. The Bosnian prefers to pick over the Kaldermas, which pretty word describes long lines of deep holes and high boulders, optimistically supposed to form a road in this interesting land.

Bosnia used to be wakeful enough. A quarter of a century ago it occupied as much space regularly in the news as the other Balkan states do today. In those days "trouble in the Balkans" was not complete without a massacre or a revolution in Bosnia.

Sometimes it was at the expense of the Christians; sometimes the Turks paid the fiddler. The bill was always large and red. After Bosnia was turned over to Austria-Hungary it became ingloriously quiet, and today it is probably mentioned less in the world's history than most native states of Interior Africa.

If Bosnia is ever shaken out of its Rip Van Winkle sleep under the shadow of its Dinaric Alp wall, now is the time; for the new banus, who has been named to govern Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia, which squeeze Bosnia between them, is a lineal descendant of the old Bosnian kings. His name is Theodor, Count Pejašević von Verocze. This is mentioned merely for local color.

The old kings or bans of Bosnia were great folk. They lived in palaces hidden in the dark mountains. It would be hard to build palaces or huts in Bosnia without having them in mountains. A Bosnian calls a place that is 2,000 feet above the level of the sea a lowland and views it as a highway of commerce.

The old Bosnian bans never failed to pick up a good fight if it lay before their doors. They fought the Turks and the Hungarians and the Dalmatians alternately. By the treaty of Berlin in 1878, after the Russo-Turkish war, when all the nations, small and big, that were engaged in the fight were presented with diplomatic gold bricks, Austria-Hungary, that didn't fight at all, got Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Bosnians tell a story to account for the formation of their land. It accounts for that and other things, among them why Bosnia is not threatening the world's markets sufficiently to frighten anybody.

The story is that one day the devil was hurrying across the Balkan peninsula to see a man. He bore on his back a few arguments in the shape of a bag full of boulders. As is well known to all who are at all acquainted with him, the devil favors his left foot, owing to a little family matter in the shape of a hoof. This made him stub his toe against Montenegro and he stumbled and fell headlong.

His bag flew over his head and the contents went helter skelter over the place that is now Bosnia. The devil was so annoyed that he left the outfit just where it dropped and went off swearing, kicking great holes into the place with his hoof.

The general and specific aspect of Bosnia today shows that the only part of the mess that has been cleared away since this happened is the bag.

Bosnia is black with mountains. There isn't such a thing as a bee line there. Traveling through it is a matter of dodging between mountains from one end of the country to the other. The rivers all fall down hill, and a Bosnian considers a river that flows without a waterfall for ten miles an important and wonderful navigable stream, and calls the village in that favored district a port.

On the Mediterranean or Adriatic side stand the Dinaric Alps, as virgin as they were when the forgotten Daclians first swarmed into Europe through their defiles. Toward the Danube are half a dozen ranges of mountains. The towns in the interior sit at the bases of mountains. The railroad runs over grad—that make it impossible to haul heavy trains. It goes over passes so dangerous that the rails have had to be made so narrow in gauge that the road is toy-like.

Yet Bosnia, although it is hardly ever heard of, is the key to an immense commerce, and Austria-Hungary is determined some day to turn that key and unlock the door that shall lead her merchants out into the Mediterranean.

Austria-Hungary is not the discoverer of the fact that Bosnia is a key. The old Romans knew it, and they hewed mighty roads through Bosnia, over the mountains, to connect the Adriatic sea with the Danube river. Venice knew it when it was the queen of the Mediterranean, and it intrigued for the possession of Bosnia as if it were an empire.

So today Bosnia's old roads are beset with the ruins of ancient Roman forts, and the greatest roads are those that were made originally by the Roman road builders.

When Turkey seized Bosnia those roads were permitted to go to ruin, which is one of the Turkish fads. Other roads, that led from Hungary to Croatia southeast into Turkey were kept in somewhat better repair; that is, a horse could get through and over them if Allah was good to it. By the time the Turkish occupation was ended about the only things that could be called roads were those leading south-east, while the roads to the Adriatic,



A TYPICAL BOSNIAN.

which should, some day, furnish a new portal for the commerce of all Europe with the Orient, had almost vanished beneath the mud of mountain torrents in flood, the debris of falling rocks and land slides.

Austria has done much to improve matters, but there is mighty little business in Bosnia, and the government couldn't educate the lecturers of the empire to the conviction that it is good financing to build hundred thousand dollar roads to transport a thousand dollars' worth of prunes, which are one of the chief staples of the province.

So today the Bosnian travels mostly afoot. After this popular mode comes the Bosnian horse, wonderfully ugly, wonderfully crowbar-like and wonderfully strong.

The deterioration of the roads under the Turk practically wiped wheeled traffic out of existence. There are wagons in Bosnia, but the rare and triumphal chariots. A wagon is a good deal of a white elephant in most districts, and the traveler who has ever tried to negotiate a mountain pass in one will never use another.

A Bosnian wagon would be a rare and valuable addition to a modern museum, if it could possibly be transported out of the country. It can't. It would surely get stuck in the blood-red mud, or sink in the coal-black bog, or fall down a slippery mountain, or sink in a torrential river before it reached a seaport.

It is based on the ancient Asiatic form of ox-cart. There is hardly a piece of metal work in the typical Bosnian wheeled vehicle. The parts are made of heavy timbers, held together with wooden tenons and with withes of willow woven back and forth like basketwork. The wheels are hewn out with a sharp axe, the favorite and almost the only tool of the Bosnian carpenter. The tongue is immensely long and sticks out in front of the oxen or the horses like a spear.

Wicked as the roads are as a whole, Austria has built some fine ones where wheeled traffic would be comfortable, but the Bosnian has not adapted himself to them. He will take the traveler by preference through the old trails.

It is more than twenty-five years now since the Turkish occupation, and the enterprising and wide-awake Austrian and Magyar are clamoring at the doors of the Bosnian with their goods.

They have pushed more than 700 miles of railroad into this land. They are tear-



A BOSNIAN BEAUTY.

ing open new and old highways. But the Bosnian ploughs in sight of railroad trains with a wooden plough made by his ancestors. In sight of freight cars and railroad stations full of modern supplies, he plods over his red roads with his feet covered by immense pouch-like shoes made of pig's skin with the bristles left on. Under Christian rule he wears his red fez and linen trousers of Turkish cut, gathered at the ankles.

And he looks at the wide, new roads, and then mounts his shaggy, thin little horse and goes pounding and stumbling and jouncing over the trail of his saddies.

The Bosnian horse is a patient beast, forgiving under insult and injury. It looks equally happy, whether mired or stabled. It is never seen by any chance without a wonderful article of furniture on its back, occupying the place reserved for a saddle in other and happier lands.

This piece of horse furniture looks most nearly like a small table with stable legs. The legs are spars to which are fastened all the articles that are to be transported.

The limit of the Bosnian horse load is defined only by the capacity of the table legs and the available amount of rope.

Bags, boxes, baskets, lumber, hay, household utensils, traveling necessaries—all are tied on till there isn't an inch of room left. There aren't any straps. Ropes are used to tie the baggage on, ropes lash the furniture to the horse, a piece of rope acts as a bridle.

When the horse has been so well packed that little of it can be seen, the Bosnian gets on himself. He sits in front of the load, and as the Bosnian idea of loading a horse is to put everything well forward, the rider sits almost on the animal's neck, much like a man mounted on a camel.

With this outfit the Bosnian is happy and the horse doesn't mind. Off go the companions, clambering. The horse can climb like a goat. It will fall into a hole, ascend a smooth face of rock, slide down another and fall into a second hole as placidly as if it were ambling over a pasture.

The Bosnian likes it, for it is literally true that where certain fearfully bad bridle paths are paralleled by excellent new highways the Bosnians still plod up and down, jolting and stumbling, along the bridle paths.

The bridle path is not ideal, but there is a worse road still, which seems to be even more of a favorite with the true Bosnian. It is the Kaldermas.

The Kaldermas is a road that was originally a mere path over fields. In a moment of ambition, long ago, the Bosnians improved these trails by throwing stones into them. As no attempt was made to make a foundation, the Kaldermas is a terror today. There isn't a town of any size in Bosnia that does not boast of approaches of this kind, and the weary traveler when he sights a town knows that his troubles have only begun, for the Kaldermas goes over rock and swamp.

The fact is that the Bosnian, although he has settled down to being a European and an Austrian, is a Turk at heart. Today Bosnia and Herzegovina together have 25 elementary European schools and 84 lower Mohammedan schools.

The Bosnian still loves a me of the Turkish ways, though he fought the Turk all the time. He prefers even now to take his disputes to a learned Turk rather than to a European judge, and it is on record that Bosnian, Croatian and Dalmatian Christians have taken their law cases to Turkish kadis on Turkish territory over and over again in recent years.

They like the Oriental method, which permits them to carry on their own case and to fight it out before the judge in person. They like, too, his method of judging. It is within their undersanding.

One of the funny Bosnian stories is about a case of just this kind. Two sisters and a brother had been supporting their old father until they grew weary of him and decided to throw him out.

The wise old gentleman discovered the plan in time. He hurried to a friend and borrowed a bag of gold. With this he repaired to his room, where he began to count it, taking excellent care to make the pieces clink loudly.

The "loving" children peered through a crack and saw the hoard. Immediately they began to rival each other in attentions and the foxy old daddy lived in clover till he died.

As soon as he had passed the children hunted for his hoard and presently found a great earthen jar sealed and extremely heavy. Forthwith they bore it to a kadi, told him the story and besought him to make the division.



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